

Memorandum



Date: August 20, 2004

To: George M. Burgess
County Manager

From: Alex Muñoz
Assistant County Manager

Subject: Enhancing Outreach and Code Enforcement Activities

As requested in the FY 2004-05 Proposed Resource Allocation Plan, this report includes recommendations on how to enhance customer service, neighborhood services, and code enforcement services. The analysis focused on two areas: a) implementation of the countywide Answer Center, and b) further enhancing code enforcement and outreach services by creating two departments with separate and distinct missions.

Implementation of the Answer Center

As part of the focus on allocating resources towards our strategic goals, the FY 2004-05 Proposed Resource Allocation Plan increased Answer Center staffing by a total of 11 positions to further ensure quality assurance, content accuracy, and expand operations with the customer service request system (CSR). With 311 implementation expected for November, we will be one step closer towards achieving our goal of improving customer service and empowering the community through increased communication with local government. The Answer Center will be a single point of contact for residents seeking information on government services through telephone access.

In the past, residents not familiar with County services may have navigated through local government bureaucracy to find the right number, service department, or contact person without much success. While we have made great strides in providing information on County services over the internet, many individuals in our community do not own or have access to a computer. Many residents can access information over the internet, but they prefer to call and speak to a live person. The Answer Center will eliminate the need for residents to undertake unnecessary steps to reach the right person, and at the same time provide live call takers than can communicate in English, Spanish, and Creole.

Residents in Miami-Dade County will be able to dial 311 and get rapid and accurate responses to inquiries without being transferred to another telephone number. Calls will only be transferred if requested by the caller or if the nature of the question or service merits direct contact with the department. As a result, it is anticipated that service delivery departments will see reduced call volumes for questions, complaints, and service requests. Furthermore, the 311 Answer Center will assist with the reduction of non-emergency calls received by 911. Answer Centers throughout the nation have helped reduced these types of calls. Miami-Dade Police Department 911 managers worked closely on the procedures developed for the routing of phone calls and are supportive of this initiative.

Additionally, calls will not be limited to county services. Once fully implemented, the Answer Center will be able to provide information and handle service requests for municipalities.

The success of the Answer Center depends on three components: a countywide database with information on all County departments and services, a service request tracking system that allows for the tracking and accountability of service tickets requested by residents for our most widely used County services, and proper staffing from various departments.

In order for this project to become an effective single point of contact, not only must residents be able to request information, but services as well. Senior staff has visited call centers around the country, including New York, Chicago, and Houston. Based on their conclusions, I am confident that the 311 Answer Center will be a success and a role model call taking center. Unlike the call centers in some of our largest municipalities, call takers at the Answer Center will use the service request tracking system as a centralized, uniform tracking system for all requests made for services. For instance, callers will be able to request information on services provided by Human Services, and at the same time take a request that a pothole be inspected.

As noted in the proposed resource allocation plan, the Answer Center will be staffed with current resources by outstationing call-taking positions from service delivery departments. It is important for the Answer Center to receive proper staffing in order to effectively respond to customers and achieve business plan objectives. Staff from our office and Team Metro have developed a staffing plan which meets our objective of enhanced customer service while minimizing the impact to operational departments. Some positions will transition immediately, while others will be phased-in over time.

Further Enhancing Outreach and Code Enforcement

In 1992, after Hurricane Andrew swept through South Florida, the County established Team Metro in an effort to provide much needed outreach on county services to areas devastated by the hurricane. With the wave of incorporations in the late 1990's, Team Metro became the front line department to promote the County and its services to address many of the unincorporated related issues. During that same time, neighborhood code enforcement functions housed at several departments such as Public Works, Planning and Zoning, and Building Department were transferred into Team Metro for better coordination and centralization.

Since then, we have established new outreach initiatives such as the Government on the Go Bus, the continuation of the Partnership, Responsibility, Involvement, Duty, and Education (PRIDE) program, and the implementation of the Answer Center. Likewise, residents and elected officials are seeing the benefits of code enforcement in the unincorporated area, and will see further enhancements through the recommended addition of four code enforcement officers in the proposed resource allocation plan. Nevertheless, we should not limit ourselves to our most recent accomplishments. It is in the County's best interest to continue implementing ways to enhance outreach services across the County.

Among the options that we considered, was to keep all outreach and code enforcement activities within Team Metro and recommend additional code and outreach positions. Although we can continue to allocate more resources to enhance outreach and code enforcement, our analysis recommends a critical, yet necessary, change to improve and strengthen both functions.

For several years now there has been much discussion on the transfer of code enforcement activities from Team Metro into another regulatory department or the establishment of a stand alone residential code enforcement department. Despite all the analysis and policy discussions, no changes were ever effectuated and Team Metro continued to function as a department with two separate and conflicting missions. While having to provide all customer-friendly and educational outreach services to County residents on one hand, the same department on the other hand was issuing and enforcing code citations, and placing and collecting liens.

More specifically, 311 operations are stand alone operations. Similarly, comparable code enforcement departments are typically just that. With the rollout of the Answer Center and outreach activities increasingly becoming more countywide in nature, it is necessary to remain with one department whose mission is to solely provide proactive and countywide neighborhood and educational outreach services, and to serve as a positive point of contact for the entire County. As a result, this has once again given us the opportunity to review and determine the proper placement of Team Metro's code enforcement activities.

While I understand that the management of code enforcement and outreach services under one department allows for some coordination between the two functions, it does not mean that we are properly meeting our residents demands. Having considered all options, I recommend that the Board approve the separation of Team Metro code enforcement activities into a separate department. In preparing the analysis, it was clear that all Answer Center operations and outreach functions would remain in Team Metro. All remaining functions associated with code enforcement field personnel, four of the eight regional coordinators, the education unit for code-specific outreach, the lien unit, and the neighborhood services division will now be rolled into the Neighborhood Code Compliance Office (NCCO).

While I strongly advocate for the separation of the two functions, we would be contradicting ourselves if services were to be diminished or reduced. Staff recommends that the eight regional offices remain with their current boundaries for countywide outreach services. Code enforcement activities in the unincorporated area will still be coordinated out of the Team Metro regional offices in FY 2004-05; however new service area boundaries will be drawn to allow for better resource allocation of code compliance officers. As a result, residents will not see a change in services. In addition, implementation of the mini-town hall concept will be enhanced by increasing coordination of several county services in the Team Metro regional offices. As you may well know, the Building Department will also work with Team Metro to use the regional offices as drop-off centers. Given the sole mission of providing countywide outreach services, and the Answer Center's ability to provide information on county and municipal agencies, I also encourage staff at the regional offices to work with municipalities within their boundaries to promote and coordinate outreach activities. I want us to go to where the people are. In the end, I believe this vision will have served its purpose to standardize services and create a one-stop countywide outreach agency.

In developing the revised FY 2004-05 recommended resource allocation plans for both Team Metro and NCCO, staff reviewed and determined which positions would add value to either of the new departments based on the classification and job descriptions. We attempted to separate the two departments without allocating additional resources to either department; however, any adjustments will be included in the mid-year budget amendment.

Based on our analysis, Team Metro will remain with a budget of \$6.458 million and 95 positions; NCCO will be established with a budget of \$10.975 million and 168 positions. The separation of the two departments will not adjust the amount of Countywide or UMSA general fund recommended in the proposed resource allocation plan.

